

Message Text

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ACTION EB-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 SS-20 NSC-07 L-03 PA-04 PRS-01

USIA-15 CAB-09 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-11

NSAE-00 RSC-01 FAA-00 DRC-01 IO-14 /123 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1641

INFO FAA BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, FR

SUBJECT: CIVAIR: COT TO LEAVE AIR FRANCE

REF: PARIS A-408

SUMMARY: PIERRE COT IS STEPPING DOWN AS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF AIR FRANCE. OUR SOURCES CLAIM HIS DEPARTURE IS VOLUNTARY. NO SUCCESSOR YET NAMED, BUT LATHIERE OF SGAC AND DREYFUSS OF PARIS AIRPORT AUTHORITY ARE SAID TO BE THE FRONTRUNNERS. LATHIERE MIGHT HAVE SLIGHTLY BETTER CHANCE BUT WOULD BE MORE WORRISOME FROM OUR STANDPOINT RE AIR FRANCE AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT POLICY.

1. LE MONDE REPORTS THAT PIERRE-DONATIEN COT, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF AIR FRANCE SINCE 1967, WILL LEAVE THIS FALL TO ACCEPT HIGH POST WITH COMPAGNIE GENERALE D'ELECTRICITE (CGE) WHICH IS LARGE FRENCH MANUFACTURER OF ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS EQUIPMENT. LE MONDE STATES THAT NAME OF COT'S SUCCESSOR AT AIR FRANCE IS NOT YET KNOWN. COMMENTING ON COT'S PERFORMANCE AT AIR FRANCE, LE MONDE NOTES ONLY

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THAT WHILE HIS TALENTS AS ADMINISTRATOR WERE MUCH

ADMIRER HIS RELATIONS WITH PERSONNEL AND ESPECIALLY
FLIGHT PERSONNEL SOMETIMES LEFT SOMETHING TO BE
DESIRED.

2. WE DISCUSSED COT DEPARTURE WITH ESPEROU OF SGAC
AND MME. RIVOAL OF AIR FRANCE, BOTH OF WHOM
INDICATED THAT TO BEST OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE COT'S
DEPARTURE WAS VOLUNTARY. MME. RIVOAL SAID THAT
COT WOULD HAVE REACHED COMPULSORY RETIREMENT AGE
AT AIR FRANCE NEXT YEAR AND APPARENTLY HAD BEEN
UNABLE RESIST PRESENT OPPORTUNITY ASSUME PRESIDENCY
OF A CGE AFFILIATE.

3. ESPEROU INFORMED US THAT TWO CANDIDATES BEING
MENTIONED MOST PROMINENTLY AS POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR
TO COT WERE BERNARD LATHIERE, DIRECTOR OF AIR
TRANSPORT AT SGAC, AND GILBERT DREYFUSS, DIRECTOR
GENERAL OF PARIS AIRPORT AUTHORITY. ESPEROU SAID
THAT AS OF THIS MORNING LATHIERE CLAIMED NOT TO
KNOW WHAT GOF'S DECISION WOULD BE. MME. RIVOAL
ALSO INFORMED US THAT WHILE LATHIERE AND DREYFUSS
SEEMED TO BE FRONTRUNNERS FOR THE JOB, NO DECISION
HAD YET BEEN TAKEN ON COT'S REPLACEMENT.

4. PROVISIONS OF FRENCH CIVIL AVIATION CODE
GOVERNING OPERATION OF NATIONAL COMPANY AIR FRANCE
STIPULATE THAT DIRECTOR GENERAL IS SELECTED BY
PRESIDENT OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS WITH THE APPROVAL
OF THE BOARD AND OF THE MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR
CIVIL AIR QUESTIONS, I.E., STATE SECRETARY FOR
TRANSPORT MARCEL CAVAILLE IN THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.
COMMENT: FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES, DIRECTOR

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GENERAL IS APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

5. COMMENT: IN THE ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY, NOTHING YET INDICATES THAT COT IS BEING FORCED OUT TO MAKE ROOM FOR MORE COMPLIANT TOP MANAGEMENT AT AIR FRANCE (REFAIR). YET CHANGE IN KEY POSITION OF DIRECTOR GENERAL WILL CERTAINLY BRING WITH IT CHANGE IN STYLE IF NOT POLICY. OF THE TWO CANDIDATES WHOSE NAMES HAVE BEEN MENTIONED TO SUCCEED COT, LATHIERE IS BETTER KNOWN TO US THAN IS DREYFUSS. COT WAS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PARIS AIRPORT AUTHORITY BEFORE JOINING AIR FRANCE IN 1967, AND ONE WONDERS WHETHER GOF WILL WISH TO ESTABLISH PRECEDENT BY HAVING DREYFUSS NOW ALSO SUCCEED COT AT AIR FRANCE. WORKING IN LATHIERE'S FAVOR, IT SEEMS TO US, IS THAT FROM HAVING BEEN FRENCH DIRECTOR OF CONCORDE PROGRAM HE WOULD AS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF AIR FRANCE HAVE SPECIAL STAKE IN ENDEAVORING MAXIMIZE CHANCES FOR COMMERCIAL SUCCESS OF CONCORDE WHEN PLACED INTO SERVICE BY AIR FRANCE IN 1976. IN HIS CONCORDE CAPACITY LATHIERE HAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALSO BEEN CLOSELY EXPOSED TO GENERAL PROBLEMS OF FRENCH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AND REASONS FOR ITS PRESENT CRISIS, WITH RESULT THAT HE IS CERTAINLY ALREADY BETTER AND MORE DIRECTLY INDOCTRINATED THAN IS DREYFUSS TO BASIS OF GOF CONCERN OVER NEED TO BOLSTER POSITION OF FRENCH CIVIL AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AND OPEN NEW MARKETS. OF THE TWO CANDIDATES, LATHIERE WOULD THUS SEEM TO BE THE MORE WORRISOME FROM OUR STANDPOINT WITH REGARD TO POSITION HE MIGHT TAKE ON FUTURE POLICY OF AIR FRANCE RE AIRCRAFT PROCUREMENT.
STONE

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